

# BETWEEN THE LINES

Oak Middle School  
2015

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## **EXCERPT OF AGENT DOG BY**

### **MEHER BHAMRA**

"Believe in yourself and you can do anything right."

-Anonymous

#### **Prologue**

It was a dark and stormy night when it happened. When the kidnapping within the famous Owl household took place. An event that made the headlines of all articles, newspapers, blogs; an event that changed the lives of two families. Two families that were once strong, passionate allies, turned to rival formidable foes.

Here is how it occurred:

That night, Professor Michael Leecard visited his colleague's home to review their research concerning their current "project". Just thinking about it, his lips curled into an excited grin, with him thinking, 'Tonight is the night.

Once we have proof we have been there, we'll change lives — for the better.' Little did he know, that this was the night, it had all gone wrong. As Leecard stepped among the huge stones to reach the entrance way, he was greeted by his friend's two youngsters: Amber and Rachel.

"Hello uncle Leecard!" said Amber. Or was it Rachel? Leecard simply smiled at them, then shook his head, as he still could not remember which sister was which. Why? Because they were exactly identical. Just then, Leecard thought, 'How on Earth do Jade and John recognize which twin is which?' As soon as he got into their home, John Owl stood up to greet his colleague friend and offer refreshments.

"Good evening Michael. Come, take a seat. Then, we can discuss our research", said John. After a few hours spent on discussing their research, John said, "Okay, we will meet tomorrow to discuss further preparations for our current project." Minutes later, Leecard left. Just then, as soon as the colleague left, a screeching sound arose, stopping the Owl family to dead silence. Jade's face grew pale as John

asked, panicking,

"Where's Amber?" Abruptly, the heart tearing scream silenced, almost as quickly as it had began.

## Chapter 1

"Shadow, I know you love climbing trees, but you better get down here this instant!" I yelled at him.

"Woof! Woof!" replied Shadow. I figured that this would be harder than I thought.

I knew I shouldn't have bought that extraordinary untested concoction that came straight from the laboratory. Then again, 90% of the outcomes weren't my fault in the first place. So when I gave the potion to him to drink, I hadn't read the label. Don't look at me. He's the one who wouldn't stop bothering me until I got the bottle for him. Later, after he drank the contents within the bottle, I read the label (it looked kind of weird) it said the potion was PERMANENT! It was already too late to turn back now. After I bought him that potion, it did some

extraordinary things that changed his life forever. He could now start to talk like humans and climb trees way better than cats and squirrels.

But...since we didn't want him to join the circus, we made him bark and act like a normal dog in the public. And since he could now talk like us (you should have seen me when he started. It was creepy!) , he told my family and I that he could read. That's why he wanted to get the concoction.

As I told Shadow to come back to the ground, a strange man in black dropped down from a helicopter and dognapped him. And right before he left, he glanced at me for a smidge of a second. Under that-midnight dark hat, I glimpsed dark, obsidian-sharp eyes as cold as Antarctica. Trust me, if you were in my shoes, you'd be so freaked out, that even your insides would be shaking.

"Think Soph, think!" I murmured to myself. Then, my instincts kicked in. First thing I did was press the gift charm on my bracelet, calling my parents. I told them everything: how Shadow had been climbing, how he was dognapped, and

even the creepy dognapper who took my dog. After that, I quickly pressed the globe charm on my bracelet. Slowly, a 3D hologram formed, locating Shadow and his whereabouts. The address? It was #49 Tickery Drive in Tonliopolis, TQ 39245.

"That's not far from here!" I exclaimed. I thought we would reach Shadow in no time. Soon enough, I told my parents, and the other agents where he was being held captive.

Pause button! Now I know what you're all wondering. What's the deal with her (my) bracelet. So before I forget, let me explain. Since my dad is a techgenius, instead a typically boring cell phone, I got a cool bracelet. And it's not just any bracelet, the different charms can do different things. For example, the gem on my bracelet can show all my personal stuff (awards, favorite \_\_\_\_, etc.), while another charm could have ebooks or can call. You get the point, right? Now, let's get back to the story:

MEANWHILE AT THE FORT...

"Dog, I command you to tell me your secrets!" said the strange man. Shadow shook his head, lips sealed and mouth shut.

"Then I shall indeed learn it the hard way", said the cloaked figure, his lips curling into a menacing grin. Shadow, unmoved by his dognapper's threatening figure, mimicked him silently, with his paws joining together to make the sign for "chatter box", which was pretty much the only thing he *could* do in his bound-up state.



*Fantasy Drawing by  
Meher Bhamra*



# Human Nature

## Emotions

The wind howls,  
The raging voice swivels my mind, I start to wonder-  
Who am i?  
I want to burst out with anger, My voice trembles,  
I slam my foot onto the ground.  
My soul turns blue;  
A tear falls down my cheek,  
I hear the whining of a child,  
I face my crouched shadow on the floor, I poignantly walk.  
I remember when i was a little one, Life was so easy,  
But we all go through pain.  
I start to decipher my inner self- We all have emotions,  
Eternally.  
I'm not the only one-  
Just thinking about it makes my soul replenished.

~Camelia Gouda

## Unique

You know what I find so beautiful?  
I think,  
That just the pure fact that every person who has ever lived,  
Has actually been really different from the rest,  
It's just so mind blowing to think about it.

We have about 7 billion people that live on this planet today,  
And billions more that have lived long before us,  
But even then,  
No two humans have ever been the same.

Not convinced?  
I can fix that,  
Close your eyes,  
Think about it for a minute,

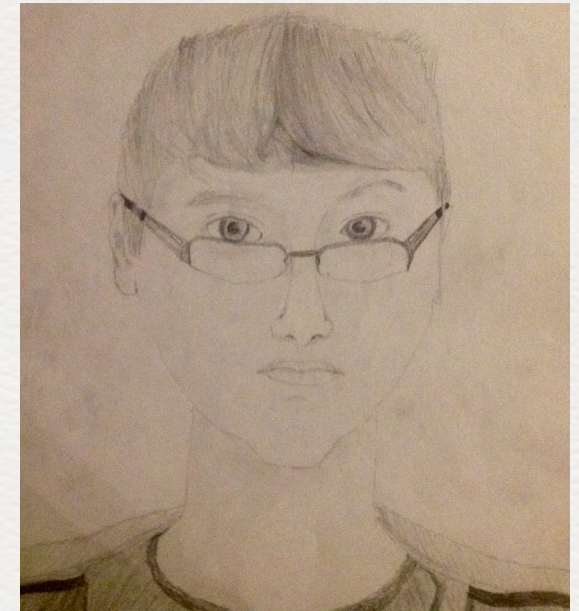
Have you ever met a person,  
That,  
Even in the most dire situations,  
Is always laughing?

Have you ever met a person,  
That,  
Always brings a smile to your face?

Or perhaps,  
You have met an individual,  
Who is always a source of inspiration.

Have you ever met someone,  
Who likes you for who you are,  
Who doesn't find the need to change you,  
Into someone completely different?

Have you ever met someone,  
Who, after some time,  
You just learn to love?  
Mark my words,  
Make a wish!



Learn to love yourself for who you really are,  
Don't be afraid,  
Allow yourself to get inspired!  
Laugh like you'll die tomorrow,  
And don't limit your love,

Because you have a special superpower,  
That separates you from people who live in the shadows of others.  
Everyone else can see it,  
Like that person who is always laughing,  
Or that special someone who always brings a smile to your face,  
And don't forget that individual,  
Who is ever so inspirational.

Look at that person who likes you for who you are,  
Or perhaps at the one, who,  
After some time,  
You learn to love.

Every one of those beings know,  
That you are your own person,  
You are an individual.

After all, everyone is different,  
Everyone has different identities,  
Different ways,  
Different lives.

There has never been anyone like you,  
There is nobody like you,  
And there will never be *anyone* like you.

Your life is like a journey,  
And your soul is the bird in flight,  
Your life is meant for you.

You are you,  
And that's why it's so beautiful.

By Shakti Kumaresan

## "The Ups and Downs of Life"

There once was a time  
When life was never sour like a lime  
When life was as pristine as a clear sky  
When I felt like I could fly

But with just my luck  
Tragedy struck  
My heart was shattered  
Nothing mattered

But then I emerged  
Like a flower just starting to bloom  
Filling the empty room  
That my loved ones left  
Without a protest

My immature nature flew right out the door  
Bringing my blissful, floating soul  
When they left my boat  
When they were knocked down  
Leaving me  
To drown

## Untitled

We all love doing thing that  
make us feel big,  
from standing on stools  
to looking down on others  
it gives us this sense of power  
and strength.

Something everyone believes  
they need,  
but me?

I want to take a step back  
let someone else take the lead.  
I want to enjoy and observe the  
beauty in everything,  
but no.

I'm forced to have this craving  
for power.  
The power which is ruining our  
world.

Veronica DeSouza

Arashleen Pannu

### The Humans

We cry to try to let the pain out  
We laugh to spread the joy about

We frown to keep our emotions inside  
We smile when we have nothing to hide

We sing to let our hearts do the talking  
We dance to let our souls do the walking

We wish for things when we know they are hopeless  
We try to get out of things we know we must cope  
with

We go past the extremes to show how we feel  
Getting more cuts and scrapes than ever may heal

We search for true love until the very end  
Getting our hearts broken again and again

Some of us are the bravest of the brave  
Some can't help but be dead afraid

Sometimes we lie and sometimes we don't  
We are the humans and we live how others won't

-Megan Whitcomb

### The Mind of a Writer

I see the world in many dimensions.

My senses burst  
With the need to explain,  
To illustrate the depth  
Of my surroundings  
In a way others  
Can understand.

Every piece of information,  
Every sight,  
Every new experience  
Enters my mind  
As words,  
As beautiful poetry  
That arranges and rearranges itself  
Into letters and syllables  
Only I can understand.

They swirl around me,  
Like dandelion seeds in the wind,  
Brushing past my body  
But just out of reach.

They are solid but transparent,  
Touchable but unrestrainable.  
They are made up of people,  
Places, and things,  
All begging to be put down on paper  
And to be made into  
Something real.

Every once in a while

One will land  
And plant itself in my mind,  
Taking root  
And occupying  
Every ounce of my attention  
And creativity  
Until it reaches full bloom.

It is a piece of nature,  
The rawest form  
Of the most inner part  
Of my imagination;  
Fictional  
Yet so absolute  
I can almost feel the soft florets  
And its gentle breathing  
As it grows.

We live off of each other,  
The dandelion and I.  
I write it,  
I create it,  
And in return  
I am immersed  
Into a world of fantasy.

It is a place where I am happy,  
Where I can let my mind wander.  
A place where I can fall  
into a world of make believe,  
And not be afraid  
Of crashing to the ground.

- Halie Tolba

## Destiny Fanfiction

By Ethen Judson

The highway was broken, on what remained was hundreds of rusted cars. "Ouch", Ghost said as he flew over a torn apart skeleton, "You're not the one...". Later on he spotted something in particular that caught him off guard, and in a flurry of light and energy, Ghost pulled matter, metal, and light into a person. He was coated in a skintight alloy of black fibers covered in an intricate form of cloth. "There you are. You have no idea how long I have searched for you." Ghost said, "You've been dead a long time...so you're going to see a lot of things you won't understand." He glanced around. "Listen, I am a ghost, actually I'm your ghost now; we have to-". A distant roar from an unseen beast made him shutter and suddenly disappear. "Don't worry, I'm still here! That was the Fallen. Quick! Get inside! I did not not bring you back just to die again!".

The man took off in a sprint towards a building near the highway, passing the rusted cars and vans. He looked up and saw massive rocket-like structures in the distance. Many looked like as though they would collapse at the slightest wind. Bridging off the building were large walls. They seemed to be protecting something, or keeping something inside.

The door slammed behind him. He could barely see. The man walked through the building. He could hear footsteps. "Stop", whispered Ghost, "they are right behind us". He almost thought he saw a foot move out of a crack in the floor as they progressed through the floor into a large room. It was too dark to see. "Stay here; Fallen thrive in the dark", Ghost said as he appeared, "We won't". Ghost propelled himself over to an area where the man could not see.

There!" Ghost shouted. Lights flicked on to reveal two rusted steel tubes. As Ghost returned, hundreds of humanoid creatures flooded across the tubes, screaming and hissing. "Hurry!" Ghost exclaimed. The man grabbed a nearby door, swung it open, and as he threw himself forward the floor gave out and he crashed onto the ground.

# Ornithology

*The Study of Birds*

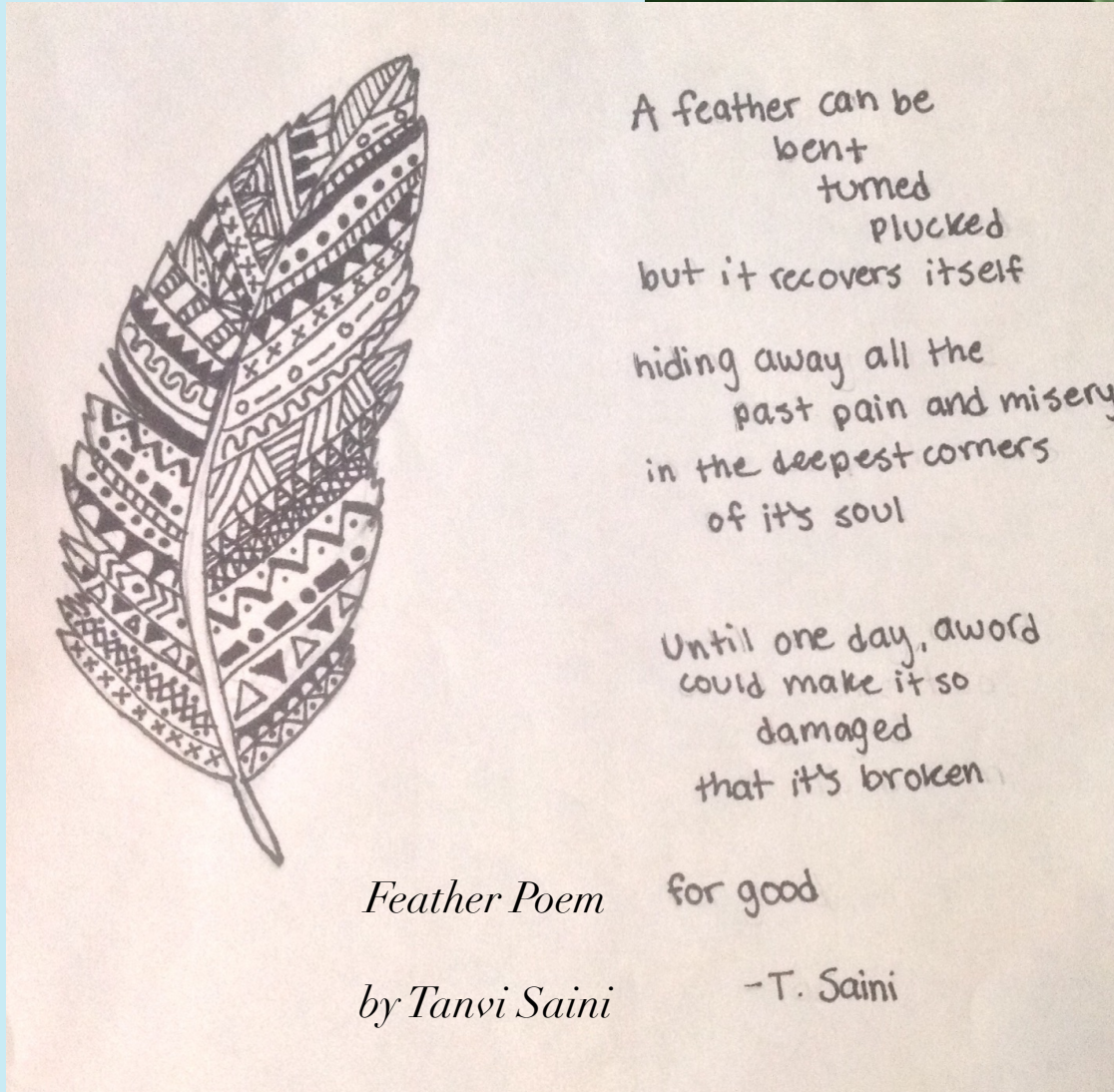


*Birds on a Tree Branch*

*By: Arimita Padam*

*Cardinal Painting*

*~Hannah Puhov*



*Feather Poem*

*by Tanvi Saini*

A feather can be  
bent  
turned  
plucked  
but it recovers itself  
hiding away all the  
past pain and misery  
in the deepest corners  
of its soul

Until one day, a word  
could make it so  
damaged  
that it's broken

for good

-T. Saini



*Peacock Mural Painting*

*by Lanna Wang*

## The Canary

The canary used to fly  
so gracefully  
through the sky.  
But one day  
she broke her wing and bruised her side  
the winds were too strong  
and no longer could she fly  
but she kept on singing  
keeping her pride

By Ria Deshpande



***Lorikeets***

***by Arimita  
Padam***



# Botany

*The Study of Plants*



*Flower Vase*

*by Lanna Wang*



*Lotus Painting*

*by Arimita Padam*

*Rose Painting*

*by Ben Harris*



*Palm Tree Island Sunset*

*by Arimita Padam*





*Tree in a Savannah*  
*by Arimita Padam*



*Palm Tree Sunset*  
*Photograph*

*by Meher Bhamra*



*Trees, Rocks, and*  
*More Snow*

*by Meher Bhamra*



## BATTLE

In the trench, the general ducked, along with many of his troops, as a new wave of fire sprang at their heads. The general huddled in the trench and turned around. He was a handsome man, with windswept brown hair and dark, humorous eyes, but today they were full of only worry. He pulled off his plumed centurion's helmet for air.

"General, what is happening?" All of a sudden a man in steel gray robes was standing solemnly in front of him. The general jumped back in shock, cursing. He was sure the man had not been there a moment ago. Maybe he was losing his mind. The battle had indeed been stressful to them all.

The stranger was holding a long staff. It was a solid gold caduceus, with crystal wings and ornate crystal snakes wrapped around the shaft that he held in his right hand, and he clutched a thick tome in his left. Under the hood, the man had a scruffy gray beard, and calculating brown-black eyes, which studied the world around. He would have been quite handsome, but his appearance was marred by a large scar that ran from his jaw to his ear.

Next to him stood another man, who had a possible family resemblance to his companion. This one, though, looked much younger and was unscarred. His beard was shorter and darker and his face firmer and younger, with startling black eyes that could pierce steel. He was dressed in a flowing crimson robe that included a heavy steel breastplate. A shaggy gray wolf nipped at his heels, but that was the least startling happening.

"Who are you?" The general demanded, as he overcame his original expression of surprise. "I am Addycis, a Mage", answered the first stranger, with the caduceus. "And I am Stygis, also a Mage, and Addycis's brother," replied the second. "What is going on right now?"

The general wiped some sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief as a new onslaught of fire blasted above them. "The Demons blasted a platoon with fire, and chased the head of the Legion into this trench." The general said disdainfully.

"The perpetual waves of fire have stopped us from advancing forward from the trenches. The only thing preventing the demons are the weakening enchantments that have been placed to shield the trenches and well as return fire intended for our archers and spearmen."

He gesticulated to a company of archers, presumably Century Archers that sat on the ridge behind them, firing arrow and after enchanted arrow at the demons moving towards the soldiers, resulting in mixed outcomes. Some exploded on contact; others released acid or spiky nets that ensnared the demons. But the strain on their faces showed they couldn't keep it up much longer. And arrows were in limited stock. Youths were running to retrieve more arrows from the armory.

"What about the Magi? Can't they help?" asked Addycis, clearly concerned at how overpowering the demon offensive was.

"Some are Century Archers, others, Centurions or Battle Mages on the front lines, answers the General. "We have about 40 trained Enchanters, but with a protection spell of this magnitude and needing to keep out so much enemy fire, we have twelve Enchanters just keeping the shield up, and yet it is still weakening. Other enchanters are desperately helping the limited numbers of healers and medics to protect and cure the wounded. Those that remain to go on the offensive are not enough."

The General then led Addycis and Stygis, as well as his trusted centurion Aetas to where the maps had been hidden, inside a dug-out. The four huddled around the table.

Aetas brought out a rather peculiar enchanted map, at least five feet by four feet. It showed the entire forces of the Legion. There were at least a thousand dots representing legionnaires. At many points along the lines numerous dots fizzed out and disappeared.

"More Casualties", explained the General grimly. At the side, there were numbers depicting how many had already died. Too many, thought Addycis. Far too many.

"And the shield spell", explained the centurion, Aetas. "It is a multilayered charm and is very complex. Our enchanters are having a tough time keeping it up. The main shield, the dome around us, crackling with energy, takes eight mages to keep up. This spell keeps out fast moving projectiles, like the fire waves, while allowing us to fire from through there. However, it does not keep people moving from moving through it, albeit slowly."

Now when they were pointing them, Addycis could see a group of magi standing, staffs upright, blue energy flowing from their staffs and forming into a dome above them that protected them.

He pointed to a section on the map on the right flank, near the woods. "They are attacking from here. They are sending squads every ten minutes to probe our defenses, occasionally sending larger forces to attack our defenses here, where they can pass through the shield. We have been forced to devote far more resources to this area than we would desire. Also, this is allowing the enemy to send creatures through the shields. Every now and then, a few of these infernal bat creatures come down and pass through the shield, abducting soldiers and causing general chaos." As if on cue, a red, leathery winged beast broke through the dome and landing somewhere among the soldiers, and picking one up, flew off.

"And here", began the General, pointing to the main front line. "Here is where we have another four enchanters putting the stronger second shield. This shield prevents people from passing through as well. But the fire is taking a main toll here. The shield is degrading at spots and that is allowing demon groups to break through before the break is restored and killing our men." There were four mages channeling more blue energy to create a second, stronger shield, but it was clear it was breaking down. And every so often, one of the mages had to step down and leave and was replaced by another.

"Yes", said the General. "We are losing more mages for the attack, because they are tired by the willpower required to keep the shield up and need to take a lot of rest after their shift."

"And this is a terrible war", continued the general. "We have been hunkered down in these trenches for hours, trying to return fire at them, them probing our defenses. Many of the men are raring to fight, but they need to stay here and rely on the shield strength to keep us safe."

"Are there reinforcements coming", asked Addycis, seeing the point at which they stood, so close to collapse.

"We have sent for more men from other areas, as well as a fleet and soldiers from the province of Carthage, but that will not be for hours."

They turned their eyes to the real action of the battle and watched, horrified as the demons got close at one point in the line and at least twenty soldiers broke out of formation and charged the attackers.

The demons retaliated in fierce hand to hand combat. A few demons were felled but the romans were slaughtered mercilessly. The demons then broke into the trench, causing havoc. On the Parchment, lots more dots disappeared and the casualties increased further.

Having finished the spell, Addycis crumpled to his knees, exhausted. It was a very draining spell and would not do much help.

The General cried out in exasperation. "We can't take so many casualties. And the protective spells are getting weaker every moment. We need to find another way to stop them. We cannot use our battle formations to any success if the fire attack continues."

Addycis had gotten back up and was looking thoughtful and suddenly snapped his fingers. "I think I've got it." He started muttering and drew a circle in the dirt inscribed with an eye and a basic outline of an eagle.

Suddenly, they were standing above the battlefield, gazing down. Vast amounts of red energy were coming from the rear of the Demon lines. A giant Demon towered over his soldiers, watching their conquest. He was huge and muscular, with a humanoid figure, deep red skin, seemingly tattooed with dark maroon runes, and a disfigured face. His expression was one of contempt, with the evil smile. The Demon was standing in front of a glowing purple portal. Every few seconds, a wave of light issued from the portal and washed over the Demon forces, seemingly allowing them to continue their endless waves of fire. As the general continued to observe, his vision started twisting and blurring, and nausea started to creep up.

Finally, when the world returned to normal, however, he was back in the trench. "What was that?" The general asked, once his stomach was under control.

"It is a combination of scrying and telepathy. I was showing you my owl's view of the battle. Not every army has the advantage of an eagle eye on the battlefield." Addycis replied. The general nodded, understanding and swallowed nervously.

Most Mages had a bonded pet that would follow them throughout their life, like Addycis's owl. Until they died..... Back to the matter at hand. "Who was that giant, that monster?" the general queried.

Addycis stared solemnly at the general. "His name is Terminus. That is his human name, a literal boundary stone of life. His demon name is Ferare Liyus, 'omen of death'. He is leading the demon forces and is about the only true obstacle for your victory, seeing as he is required to keep the portal to Earth opened."

Addycis leaned on his staff, smiling. “Truly kill him? Oh, you would have to take holy water, which would kill anything less than an angel or god touching it, and melt anything less than blessed gold, then splatter Terminus. He would’ve killed you by then.

“Yes,” continued Stygis. “You want to banish him, or kill him normally. That would keep him away for some time.”

A unfortunate legionnaire standing on the trench screamed as he got burned by the on and off waves of fire and heat. As a medic in white armor, denoting his status, attended to him, the general turned back to Addycis and Stygis.

“However, we have to get past their incessant waves of fire, and considering their literal firepower, we won’t be able to puncture our way to Termin...” the general was cut off by Addycis. “We don’t pierce the enemy lines, we warp.

By Anirudh Iyer

# *The World in Pictures*



Westborough, MA Pic  
By Meher Bhamra



SUNSET CLOUDS PIC,  
WESTBOROUGH, MA  
BY MEHER BHAMRA



Traditional-looking view Pic,  
Khota, India  
By Meher Bhamra



Lighthouse Painting  
By Lanna Wang



Mountains pic North  
Conway, NH  
By Meher Bhamra



Sunset with a Factory  
pic, Kota, India  
By Meher Bhamra

Scenery Painting  
By Meher Bhamra



Sunset Island  
Painting  
By Meher Bhamra

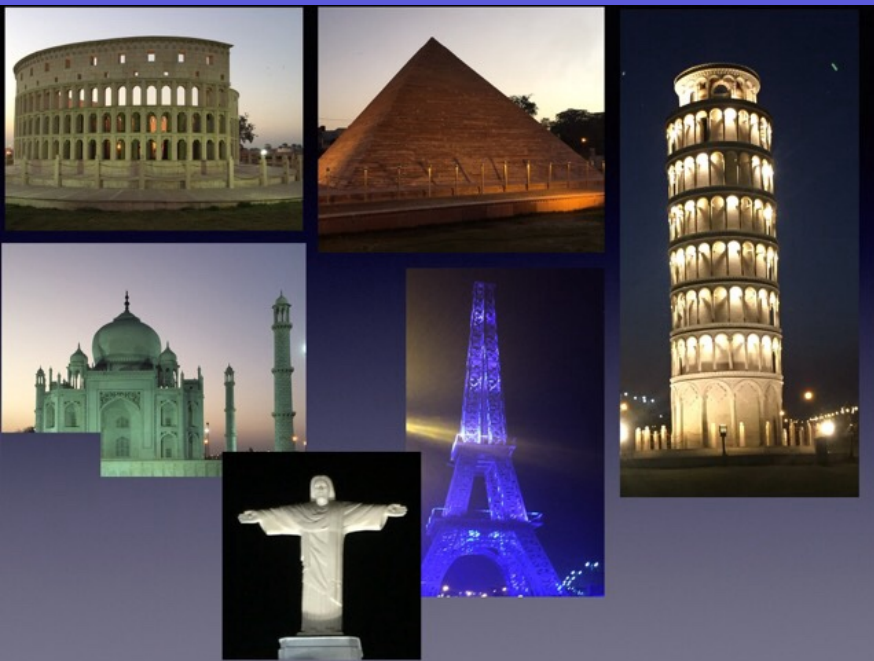


Morning Sunrise pic,  
Shrewsbury, MA  
By Meher Bhamra



London Bridge

Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple), Amritsar, India pic  
The Holiest Sikh Gurdwara  
By Meher Bhamra



7 Wonders of the World Park  
pictures, Kota, Rajasthan,  
India  
By Meher Bhamra



(from left to right) The  
Roman Colesseum, The  
Great Pyramid, The  
Leaning Tower of Pisa,  
The Taj Mahal, The Eiffel  
Tower, and the Statue of  
Jesus overlooking Rio de  
Janeiro.

## Creative Essay

### By Colleen McNamara

Clouds split as rays of golden sun peek through. The game of peek-a-boo continued while the sea of light blue crashed on yellow pebbles. Finally, a ripple of clear blue sky danced above. The pail grass hopped and singed as the wind hit there backs. Dunes of shells, slimy green leafs and wet strands of crushed rock piled near the entrance. Sand tickled running down my tan toes. Looking up colorful shapes connected to strings flew in circles, white feathered birds dip down above the water. Getting closer to the pool of water, girls and boys paddled toward a huge wave increasing in size, hovering over the children, ant children compared to it. White feathered animals dove down to shore, snatching whatever they could find. Laughs and giggles filled the warm air. Castles created barriers to some parts of the water while rocks created a path. Hopping one foot after the other on various colored rocks, the sun shined bright and the clouds vanished. Sweeps of light blue water didn't crash as hard on the pebbles and the pail grass stopped sighing and swaying. Dunes of misfit objects got picked up and dwindled down into nothing. Sand stopped tickling my toes because the kite shapes stopped flying in circles. White feathered birds flew away from the water since the boys and girls swam away from the waves. Seagulls stopped being seagulls whereas the laughter slowed down to a whisper. Castles shrunk their shoulders and opened their gates allowing the path of rocks to go home. It was just me and the beach, my, how perfect it was.

## Beach Painting

### By Lanna Wang



**JET**  
**BY TANNER WALLING**



**ABOVE: WALL CLOUD BY TANNER WALLING**

**BELOW: ICY ROAD BY TANNER WALLING**



**Knowledge Poem  
By Megan Whitcomb**

You have already given me the honor of getting my previous submission published, but my friend told me we are allowed to turn in multiple pieces, so I hope you will consider this poem for your magazine as well.

Knowledge is power, that is what they always say  
But I've learned it's sweet deadly poison that eats you away

Forgive and forget, the phrase does not ring true  
For information lives forever tormenting you  
Once you have received a detail or fact  
There is no way you may give it back  
And words can dig the deepest holes  
Always growing, eating away at your soul  
It is power in a way, it can fuel heartache  
But don't tell me it is the best risk to take  
For once I've heard something I never needed to know  
It clamps a cage shut inside me, and refuses to let go

Knowledge is power, it plagues my brain  
But I've learned it knows how to bring the fiercest pain



**Above: Girl Drawing  
By Nyla Wansley  
Below: Butterfly by  
Sonu Patel**





Cyborg  
By Arimita Padam

## The Catalyst by Tanner Walling

I opened my sore eyes trying to recall what happened. The icy wind battered my suit. Wait. Why was it so cold?

I tried moving my right arm. My elbows ached as I moved it, but it was otherwise fine. I tried moving my left arm upwards. A searing pain crippled my arm and I dropped my arm back to the ground.

What had happened? I had no memory of where I was, why I was here, or what was going on.

I scanned the ground around me. The ground was a silvery grey. This was definitely off. Gliese 581 d wasn't supposed to be this color.

I put all my weight on my right arm and pulled myself up. I looked out across the horizon. The enormous planet of Jupiter hung low in the sky. Something had gone horribly wrong yet the starship wasn't here. I turned around, trying not to move my left arm. In front of me stood the wreckage of the ship. The engines were all but a burning mass of flames and large parts of the hull were ripped out.

I walked over to the ship and ran my hand across the charred metal. A titanium plaque on it read, "The Catalyst". This was definitely the ship. I ducked through a hole in the hull and brushed some dangling wires out of the way as I stood up.

The place I had called home for the past few months was all but destroyed. Then the flood of memories came back to me.

At about 18:24 Earth Time it was reported that there was a gash through the left side of the hull. I was working in the lab when the lab master, Issac, pulled me out of the lab and to an emergency room.

I put on a skintight undersuit followed by a protective space suit to defend against the harmful radiation of the solar wind.

They had started to load people onto the safety pod. I was on the first safety pod, Pod 9026.

As my pod started descending towards the moon below I saw it all happen. An enormous burst of solar wind hit The Catalyst tearing straight through its hull as if it were a flimsy piece of paper. The massive pieces of the hull rained down upon the moon.

The pods were set to autopilot. I had tried to rip out some of the wiring in hopes of gaining control of the pod. It was of no use.

A large piece of the hull fell down towards my pod. I went down on my hands and knees and covered my head. I had thought that it was the end.

The hull piece struck the pod, obliterating it within a second. After that, everything was black.

I looked around the wreckage of the ship. The entire hull had been burned and/or blown up. Much of the ship was unrecognizable.

As I walked into the wreckage my visor scanned some organic matter a few feet in front of me. I walked over to it and went down on a knee. I looked at it carefully, trying to make out what it was. I then realized that it was a crew member.

I searched the body for its ID card. I reached into the torn front pocket and pulled out a tiny piece of plastic. I flipped it over in my hand. It was ID#87704. According to the numbers this crew member was working in the kitchen.

I stood back up and exited the wreckage. I would have to start a shelter and such. My food and water sources in my life support pack would only last so long.

I glanced out over the horizon. Something on it was moving and it was moving fast. A ear-shattering screech rang out from the horizon and two creatures came into view.

They looked like a cross between a raptor and a falcon. So there was life on Europa. But that was the least of my worries. As they approached I took off and ran.

## Determination

By Haleema Siddiqui

Have you ever made a commitment to anyone?  
It's not easy,  
and it's not always fun

The difference between success and failure is a mystery  
to almost all,  
They wonder if its luck or a miracle  
that will cushion their fall

What you need is true dedication,  
A ton of wit and strong determination.  
The world is in motion,

And if it must,  
it will leave you behind,  
to disappear and rust.

Determination will determine,  
Test the desire,  
and the will of a person.

Will you fall behind  
Or rise up,  
Determinate,  
And use your own mind?

## BULLETHOUSE

### BY AJAN PRABAKAR

I run up the stairs, arms burning, eyes watering, and breath fading. Resonance is waiting for me at the end and she grabs my hand. She hoists me up and I close the door behind me.

"Were the lights off down there?" she inquires.

I nod and we walk upstairs together. I don't want to tell her what happened down- I hear some grating metallic noises coming from outside the house and gaze out the window. There's a group of Outsiders out there, all of them wearing Gasfribilators and carrying menacing looking crowbars with the ends sharpened. I see one of the women wearing body armor.

"We need to get moving."

I nod again and point at the glass door.

The sky is yellow and thick like the soot stained ground. The majority of the world is

covered in this yellowish-gray filmy dust and it kicks up everytime I step down. It's heavy and my breath sucks it in as we sprint across the street.

All remnants of the Drug wars. The drug lords bombarded all of Perese with relentless Spore bombs. Our government was too busy with deforming landscapes and the lack of food to deal with them. The drug cartels began stocking up on ADREN, which had just been created, and weapons.

Eventually the battles between the cartels escalated into all out war. The government stayed behind the scenes while the cartels wiped each other out using the bombs. The spores slowly laid waste to the land by spreading fungus everywhere. Even now, over 200 years later, it's hard to breathe and the only thing alive other than us are the luminescent mushrooms littering the walls, dead tree trunks, and the barren ground.

Resonance was telling me about how her great grandfather was a smuggler for the Southern Cartel of Perese. She wasn't proud of where her family came from and I could understand that. I had come from a higher class that was deep in corruption.

Across the street, the familiar sound of splintering wood rings out. I pray that the Outsiders don't hear us. Our bodies lay flat across the floor and we see the group entering our former residence.

"Screw em'. We need to keep moving. Even if they see us, they won't give a crap about two teenagers."

I shake my head in disapproval.

"What? It's true. It doesn't matter, I have a treat waiting for em' in my knapsack.", she pats her bag.

I nod and we run to the house next door. I jiggle the doorknob and shake my head discouraged.

"Lemme see if there's a back door."

She is the most resourceful and observant one in our duo so I know that she will find another entrance. I glance back at the house and see the Outsiders through the window. Their faces look puzzled. I hide in some charred foliage and desperately hope that Resonance has found a back door. I sneak around to the other side where I find her smashing through a door with her crowbar. I slowly crawl through the broken remains.

"I think I hear some voices." she whispers into my ear.

I sneak to an upturned table.

The voices become clearer now, "We need to get outta here."

"Why?"

"Just have to keep moving."

"This about those people knocking on our door? You know we can take em'."

"I know, but I'd rather not risk it. Supplies are dangerously low."

"Even if you don't help me, I'm going after those two. We could take their supplies." "Sure, I guess." the second voice says hesitantly.

I grab a shard of glass tightly and edge closer to the table. I hear footsteps getting louder. Louder. Louder.

I stab myself with a dose of ADREN Plus. I motion to Resonance, she's already fashioned a makeshift shiv out of scrap metal. I motion to the voices' general direction and she nods confidently. I don't understand how she can look so confident, my own hand is shaking every which way. The man's foot nears closer to the edge of the table. Resonance and I jump up. The man's face is startled as we both try to slice his arm with our shivs. We succeed and the man stumbles back.

"What the hell? Let's just get outta here" the second man shouts.

The men run out of the front door. Both of us breathe a sigh of relief and make our way to the living room.

I notice a sign on the wall and Resonance gasps, "Bullethouse 207A"

This is what they were talking about back home. I had heard about this when I was back in New Haven. This is one of the houses that they used as makeshift prisons during the Peak of population. There is a thin layer of broken wood and glass that crunches every time I step down. The walls are smeared with dirt and the windows are all broken. No wonder we had been finding ADREN all over the place.

I needed to look around and scavenge for any food or bandages. Ah, downstairs usually have a lot more supplies.

The walls are plated with wood and metal. I notice a huge hole in the wall and step back. The entire place is filled

with yellow, sparkling particles. I motion to Resonance to come down here.

She sees the particles with a disgusted face and hands me a gas mask. I point to the filter, wary.

"It's new. I just checked it before we left. I'll stay up here while you find somethin'."

I put the Gasfribilator on and immediately my vision narrows and my breath become more shallow. Family photos litter the walls and the floor. I figure this is where the convicts kept their personal belongings. Older, nearly faded photographs lie below the newer ones and tell me that they belonged to the house's original owner. I walk further down the hallway and shine my light on what seems to be an education console-

"What would you like to learn today?" a thin metallic voice rings out.

I step back as loud crunches of glass and wood reaches my ears. I look down at the empty syringe of ADREN in my pocket and decide that, that's what I

'want to learn about today.' I bring my fist down on the 'cannot speak' option. A keyboard pops out of the console and I begin typing quickly with loud clicks and clacks erupting from the console's damaged speakers. The decals and signs are faded and the screen looks black and white.

"Command accepted. Beginning lesson now. [ADREN is a drug developed by Obayashi Corporation LTD. ADREN was created first in the year 2135 by neurologist Hiroshi Obayashi. The drug is a compound of adrenaline and other psychoactive chemicals bonded together as a painkiller. It heals and rejuvenates its user. Its counterpart ADRE is used for recreational purposes. Finally, ADREN plus is a drug only used by the military to heighten soldier reaction speeds and harden strength as well as reduce any pain felt during battle. This drug is not intended for consumer use.]

Thank you for listening!"

To be Continued.....

